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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000378

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDAN'S PARLIAMENT ENDS RAUCOUS AND UNPRODUCTIVE  
SESSION

REF: A. AMMAN 242

[1](#)B. 08 AMMAN 3335

[1](#)C. 08 AMMAN 2941

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Parliament ended its ordinary session on February 4 having passed few bills of consequence during a four-month term. MPs were more focused on the Gaza crisis and internal quarrels than on legislative business. For its part, the cabinet failed to forward key pieces of legislation on to the lower house for consideration, delaying action on a number of hoped-for statutes. The cabinet may have held back bills for an extraordinary session when the set agenda leaves little room for parliamentary debate, streamlining the passage of complicated legislation. End Summary.

Unproductive Session Ends  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The ordinary session of Jordan's parliament ended on February 4 after four months of work that resulted in the passage of twenty laws. Beyond the 2009 budget and a welcome anti-trafficking in persons statute (Ref A), parliament's output included the following:

- Amendments to the Jordan Medical Association Law
- Amendments to the Nursing Law
- Law to Abolish the Higher Media Council
- Youth Welfare Law
- International Convention Against Doping in Sport
- Amendments to the Higher Education and Scientific Research Law
- Amendments to the Antiquities Law
- Amendments to the Jordanian Medical Board Law
- Jordanian Red Crescent Law
- 2009 Budget Law
- Amendments to the Law on Wounded Military Personnel
- Law to Combat AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
- Approval of the Provisional Medical Research Laws of 2001 and 2003
- Iftaa (Fatwa Authority) Law
- Agricultural Risk Fund Law
- Livestock Support Fund Law
- Independent Government Units Law
- Law on the Confiscation and Transaction of Immovable Properties

The Government Bottleneck  
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[1](#)3. (C) In large part, the lack of substantive legislation from this session was due to the Cabinet's failure to move forward key bills to the lower house. Draft economic reforms that stalled during the cabinet approval process or were held

back from lower house consideration include a comprehensive tax reform bill, social security reform, amendments to Jordan's labor law, a new copyright law, an energy law, and a landlords and tenants law. Proposed political reforms that remain in the cabinet include a wide-ranging penal code reform bill, a law on minor prisoners, and amendments to the controversial law on associations.

¶14. (C) Several laws were introduced in the final week of the parliamentary session, giving parliament little or no time for action. After the Ambassador pressed the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Chief of the Royal Court for movement on laws of bilateral interest, the government sent parliament the trafficking-in-persons law, Jordan Institute for Standards and Metrology law (key for implementation of the US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement), and a customs reform law. Only the statute to combat trafficking in persons was passed. The next opportunity for the cabinet to move forward draft legislation for parliament's consideration will likely be during an extraordinary session over the summer.

#### Focus on External and Internal Conflicts

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¶15. (SBU) From the end of December onwards, several sessions in the lower house were dominated by passionate debates on the Gaza crisis. Islamic Action Front MPs, in particular, used these sessions to broadcast their views and chastise the government. In a bid to capitalize on public outrage over Gaza, MPs from across the political spectrum started a drive to bring legal action against Israel for war crimes. MP Mubarak Abbadi, the pro-business head of parliament's legal committee, led the charge, personally bringing a petition from Jordan's parliament to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

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¶16. (SBU) Internal quarrels and jealousies following leadership elections also marked the session. A bloc of secular opposition MPs, angry after being denied leadership positions, staged walkouts on several occasions. In other sessions, deputies from the bloc used question-and-answer time to launch personal attacks against other MPs designed to demonstrate that speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali (despite his theoretical command of a majority of MPs) was unable to maintain order.

¶17. (SBU) Speaker Majali adjourned the final meeting of the ordinary session after a verbal altercation between former PM Abdulraouf Rawabdeh and Islamic Action Front (IAF) deputy Hamzah Mansour grew into a brawl. Rawabdeh reportedly chided the IAF for its support of Hamas, calling it "harmful to the country". Mansour responded by implying that Rawabdeh supported Israel's attack on Gaza. The exchange caused a flurry of shouting between pro-establishment MPs and those from the IAF that escalated into MPs throwing piles of paper and bottles of water.

#### Worse than Zimbabwe?

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¶18. (C) The session drew a new round of condemnation from the lower house's many critics. Senator and former PM Taher Al-Masri told poloff that the current parliament is "worse than Zimbabwe's." Grumbling about parliament's weakness has spread during the past month through Amman's political salons, and prompted a statement by the Islamic Action Front calling for early elections. (Note: The next round of parliamentary elections is not supposed to take place until ¶2011. End Note.) Speaking to the political gossip website Ammonnews, lower house speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali said that he was "aware of such talk" but gave it little credence.

¶19. (C) Comment: While some contacts blame MPs for Parliament's lack of effectiveness, it is clear that PM Nader

Al-Dahabi and his Cabinet failed to move forward key legislation. The PM may have been trying to avoid parliamentary scrutiny in the middle of the Gaza crisis, but Dahabi's personality may also be part of the equation. Dahabi is methodical but also cautious in what he sends forward to parliament, recognizing that rogue MPs may spin issues to their own political gain. The government may have also held back bills for an extraordinary session when the agenda is set by the King and there is little opportunity for debate. In that case, bills tend to receive an up or down vote, streamlining the passage of complicated legislation.  
End Comment.  
Beecroft